

No Sign of Rap Brown On Eve of Bel Air Trial

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By Jim Mann

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Court proceedings in the case of H. Rap Brown, postponed last Tuesday after a bomb explosion killed Ralph E. Featherstone and William (Che) Payne, are scheduled to resume today in Bel Air, Md.

Brown, who is free on \$10,000 bond, is charged with incitement to riot and arson in Cambridge, Md., in 1967. He has not been seen in public at least since March 8, the day before the start of his trial, but some law enforcement officials have said that he was hidden in a Bel Air motel that night.

Yesterday Brown's chief attorney, William M. Kunstler, who was in Cambridge on last-minute pretrial investigations, said he still did not know Brown's whereabouts.

Continual checks at Brown's Harlem apartment produced no sign of the black militant leader or his wife.

Today's courtroom session already has been reserved for preliminary motions, and Brown is not required to appear moved from Bel Air. The motions are expected to center on renewed defense efforts to have the trial moved from Bel Air. Under present scheduling, however, it is likely that Brown will be required to attend the Tuesday session in which jury selection is scheduled to begin.

Under Maryland law, a defendant may waive his right to be present during jury selection but the court must concur in the waiver.

See BROWN, A7, Col. 1

BROWN, From A1

If Harford County Circuit Court Judge Harry E. Dyer Jr. refuses to do so — or if Brown fails to appear in court after



FRANCES BEAL
... read statement

the jury selection — his \$10,000 bond could be forfeited and a bench warrant could be issued for his arrest.

Brown's trial was moved from Cambridge to Bel Air by a Dorchester County judge after State's Attorney William Yates II argued that a fair and untroubled trial could not be held in Cambridge, the scene of racial unrest on several occasions in the past decade.

Last week, Kunstler and assistant defense counsel Carl Broege moved to have the trial shifted back from Bel Air, which has a Negro population of less than 10 per cent, to Cambridge, which is about one-third black.

They also requested a pretrial ruling from the Maryland Court of Appeals on the legality of the original transfer, to which they have objected from the beginning.

Judge Dyer denied both these motions. The defense attorneys are expected to argue today that what they call a state of tension engendered by the fatal explosion last week makes a fair trial impossible.

The bomb exploded at 11:42 p.m. Monday, a quarter of a mile south of Bel Air on U.S. Rte. 1 completely demolishing a 1964 Dodge Dart. In the debris, police found two bodies later identified as those of Featherstone, and Payne, both associates of Brown in the Student National Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Featherstone, a Washington native, was a long-time civil rights activist, a personal friend of Brown and the national program director for SNCC. Among the papers found with his body was a letter from Cuba, written in Spanish, addressed to "Companero Rolf."

In 1968 he had attended an international cultural convention in Cuba during which he told a Havana newspaper: "Here we feel this is the only free territory in America."

On Saturday, Maryland Gov. Marvin Mandel released an FBI report which said the automobile explosion was caused by dynamite. The report said the two men must have known the dynamite was in the car.

However, Mandel said he had drawn no conclusions about the bombing. Kunstler said Saturday he did not believe "the official story."

Investigations into the Bel Air incident and into an explosion Tuesday night that blew a huge hole in the Dorchester County courthouse in Cambridge—where the trial was to have been held originally—are continuing, officials said yesterday.

A statement issued in Washington in the name of SNCC called yesterday for "massive retribution and revenge for the vicious murders of Ralph Featherstone and Brother Che."

The statement said, "it must be made crystal clear that H. Rap Brown is NOT at home."

It urged blacks to "keep in mind the very real possibility that the body of Rap Brown was removed from the scene of the murder by the racist white power structure in order to avoid massive reprisals in the United States."

At a midday news conference, Frances Beal, who identified herself as chairman of the SNCC national woman's committee, refused to say anything beyond the prepared statement or to answer questions concerning the claim that Brown may be dead.